

Stories of deservingness from one of the most generous countries in the world

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Abstract

Canada is popularly known and valued on the global stage as one of the most generous, compassionate and benevolent countries in the world. Indeed, Canada has been built on principles of pluralism and tolerance, and has welcomed immigrants from all corners of the world for longer than it has been a nation. On the other hand, Canada's commendable national identity has also, at times, drawn attention away from English--French Canadian disputes, obscured the marginalization and mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples, and helped to crystallize immigrants and refugees as cultural strangers to the national body (Mackey 2002, 23).

This paper brings forth some of the stories not always reflected in, but often deeply impacted by, Canada's (and Canadians') national mythologies and multiculturalist successes. I present data from a four--month ethnographic study of how immigrants are negotiating deservingness and belonging amid the contemporary Canadian immigration landscape – a landscape that can be both welcoming and exclusionary, often at the same time. This research focused on the little---known and relatively remote region of Northern Ontario, where immigrants are relatively isolated from Canada's main immigration hubs, and have quite limited economic, social and cultural resources with which and from which to negotiate deservingness and belonging. They must therefore often look to what local discourses, national mythologies and global trends tell them, to form and re---form their understandings of whether or not they are 'worthy'. Ultimately, participants' deservingness stories are a powerful reminder that it is not only those in irregular immigration situations or in far---off locales who experience feelings of undeservingness or unbelonging; those in favourable immigration contexts can feel this way, too. Perhaps more importantly, these stories bring to light subtle forms of discrimination, marginalization and social injustice, ever---present even in multicultural in Canada.